



JOURNAL OF DIVERSITY AND
EQUITY IN EDUCATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Onufer, L., Yegnashankaran, K., Lawrence, S., Lockett, L., & Wright, H. (2025). Revealing the Hidden Curriculum of Educational Development: Academic Writing Collaboratives as Counterspaces. *Journal of Diversity and Equity in Educational Development*, 1(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.5070/N5.47040>

Reflections on Practice

Revealing the Hidden Curriculum of Educational Development: Academic Writing Collaboratives as Counterspaces

Lindsay Onufer¹ , Kritika Yegnashankaran² , Stacey Lawrence³ , Laina Lockett⁴  and Heather Wright⁵

¹ University Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Pittsburgh

² Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University

³ Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University

⁴ Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, George Mason University

⁵ Center for Teaching & Learning, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

This reflection article explores the formation and impact of an academic writing group composed of minoritized educational developers, members of the POD Academic Writing Scholars. In our discussions, we identified a common experience of a hidden curriculum of educational development in which scholarly publishing is an unspoken expectation yet often remains unsupported and unrecognized by our institutions. This hidden curriculum reinforces exclusionary academic norms that disproportionately disadvantage minoritized scholars. We reflect on our writing collaborative as a counterspace, a space for mutual support and solidarity, in which we could explore and resist the hidden curriculum. By examining the barriers we encountered and the insights that emerged from our work together, we describe how writing groups can help educational developers critically examine the norms of our field, build identities as academic writers and community, and affirm diverse forms of academic writing. We share recommendations for how institutions, teaching centers, and educational developers can reveal and challenge the hidden curriculum. Our experiences demonstrate how counterspaces like our not only support individual and collective growth, but can also contribute to broader conversations about systemic inequities in educational development.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, counterspace, Academic Writing, educational development, faculty development

Introduction

In educational development, publishing in peer-reviewed academic outlets operates as an often-unspoken expectation for advancing in our careers. We offer this collective reflection on our experience forming an academic writing group designed to challenge scholarly publishing as a component of the hidden curriculum in educational development.

Lindsay Onufer; Kritika Yegnashankaran; Stacey Lawrence; Laina Lockett; Heather Wright

The authors have no competing interests to declare. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lindsay Onufer, lro8@pitt.edu

As participants in the POD Academic Writing Scholars, we initially met in a space structured to help minoritized writers engage in scholarly writing. Academic writing groups have been shown to increase writing productivity and foster peer support and professional growth (Wentworth et al., 2024), particularly for minoritized scholars (Babcock et al., 2022; Murray & Kempenaar, 2018; O'Meara et al., 2017; Spencer, et al., 2022; SSFNIRIG, 2017). We all identify as women with intersecting minoritized identities which affect how we navigate our roles in research-intensive universities that often center whiteness, maleness, and faculty-driven concepts of scholarly legitimacy. Our conversations together expanded beyond writing to the broader contexts of our work as educational developers. We realized that we shared experiences of navigating tacit expectations around scholarly publishing that assumed access to research and writing training and resources typically available to faculty.

Recognizing this shared challenge, we formed an academic writing collaborative that continued meeting monthly after the POD Academic Writing Scholars concluded. Beyond supporting one another's writing, our group was also interested in examining this hidden curriculum and how it shaped our experiences and self-conceptions. To frame this reflection, we have included excerpts from a recorded discussion of how our group formed, operated, and the lessons we learned. We believe this reflection can catalyze dialogue about the hidden curriculum of educational development and offer insights into how writing groups can go beyond supporting productivity to help members redefine what constitutes scholarly writing in educational development.

Scholarly publishing: A hidden curriculum of educational development

The *hidden curriculum*, a term first coined by Jackson (1968) and later explored in higher education contexts (Margolis, 2001), refers to the unspoken expectations and norms that shape and create barriers to professional and academic success, particularly for minoritized people who are subject to systemic inequities. We identified scholarly publishing as one aspect of the hidden curriculum in educational development because it shapes how our work is valued and advancement opportunities while remaining largely absent from formal role descriptions or professional development pathways. As one group member succinctly noted, "It's publishing. That's the hidden curriculum. Publishing is the foundation. It's interesting how that just isn't a part of the conversation within our CTL" (Lawrence et al., 2025, 11:59). While publishing scholarly work is often an expectation, we were not explicitly encouraged to write. As another group member described, "None of us [educational developers] are encouraged to publish. For a long time, we weren't allowed to, and now even though we are, the implicit understanding is that our other work always takes priority. But if you look at our unit leadership, most of them have published" (Lawrence et al., 2025, 15:04). As this anecdote illustrates, even within the same teaching centers, some educational developers (often those in leadership positions) manage to navigate this hidden curriculum while others cannot.

All group members reported surprise at colleagues' publications and anxiety about overcoming barriers to their own scholarly writing. Barriers included limited encouragement from leaders, scarce mentorship or writing communities, and few feedback opportunities. Most significantly, there was a lack of clearly communicated expectations around scholarly publishing in our roles. These dynamics reflect the complex positionality of educational developers, who often occupy "third space" roles that blend faculty and staff responsibilities (Whitchurch, 2008). Educational developers are expected to possess deep pedagogical and institutional knowledge, yet their contributions are frequently undervalued due to the lack of a clearly defined professional identity within universities.

At the same time, the institutional significance of our work continues to grow. As Wright (2023) argued, teaching centers play an increasingly important role, not only in supporting teaching, but in generating

knowledge and driving institutional change. By bridging research and practice, teaching centers help fulfill the missions of their universities, even as the educational developers' roles may remain inconsistently defined. Our work is frequently framed as service rather than scholarship, which diminishes its intellectual value and leads institutions and colleagues to undervalue our contributions (O'Grady, 2024; Rudenga & Gravett, 2020; Sotto-Santiago, 2020). Without clearly defined role expectations, universities often fall back on and hold educational developers to models of success that prioritize scholarly publishing without providing adequate resources or support.

Academic writing collaborative as counterspace

Our academic writing collaborative sought to create the support we did not find at our own institutions. Our group has never solely focused on writing productivity. We prioritize community, reflection, and care. As one group member described, "One of the superpowers of a group like ours that centers underrepresented folks within educational development is that a lot of us kind of get what building liberatory community spaces looks like. We've had practice in developing them" (Lawrence et al., 2025, 42:33). That shared knowledge shows up in how we listen to and support each other. The practices we cultivated were deliberately grounded in principles consistent with counterspaces, as articulated within Critical Race Theory (CRT).

The counterspaces framework (Case & Hunter, 2012; Tate & Michaux, 2023) reflects CRT's commitment to social justice by illustrating how minoritized individuals create affirming spaces to challenge dominant structures and create collective empowerment (Caballero & Knupsky, 2019; Cropps, 2018; Murray & Kempenaar, 2018; Tate & Michaux, 2023; Yim et al., 2023). Case and Hunter (2012) argued that, in counterspaces, minoritized people can redefine dominant narratives that misrepresent them, engage in socially supportive acts consistent with their identities, and critique oppressive systems. By this characterization, our group also functions as a counterspace, creating an affirming environment that allowed us to challenge dominant notions of legitimate scholarly writing.

Our monthly meetings operate with rotating facilitators who plan flexible agendas that evolve to meet the needs and interests of group members. Members participate as they are able, with some connecting in pairs outside of group meetings to offer additional support and others stepping back when their capacity is limited. Meetings often include discussion, collaborative writing, feedback, or simply holding space to name and process professional challenges. Group members celebrate successes but also strive to normalize struggle and care as part of the writing process, engaging in narrative identity work that affirms us as writers.

Even within the supportive structure we have built, the group has encountered challenges. Finding time to meet is an ongoing struggle. We often prioritized other work tasks over our own scholarship, making it difficult to give our writing sustained attention. We worked to balance building community with supporting writing goals, dividing meetings to address both. Despite these challenges, our group remained committed to our shared goals and sustaining a supportive, low-pressure group dynamic. Compared to individualistic models of scholarship, our collaborative offers a counter-hegemonic alternative by centering community and belonging among educational developers (Kiesow et al., 2023), particularly members of minoritized groups.

Redefining how we think about scholarly writing

Being in community has also helped us question the narratives we have internalized about scholarly writing and ourselves as writers. Through conversation, we came to see writing as a meaningful practice rather

than just a deliverable. “I find a lot of what I get out of this group,” one member explained, “is less how much writing I do and more how I feel about the writing I do” (Lawrence et al., 2025, 12:50). We also began to value the spectrum of writing that we already produce. When we collectively tallied our written contributions from 2024, we determined that we had written 158 non-traditional academic texts, including scholarly website articles, blog posts, digital guides, podcasts, videos, written workshop materials, reports, and white papers, many not attributed to us by name. In comparison, we published nine peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. A group member described how her understanding of her own writing transformed, stating “What weird flips am I doing in my brain to be thinking I’m not a writer? I’m not an academic writer. I haven’t written anything in such a long time. I suck. You know that spiral thing. I’m like, ‘Wait a minute. I write things all of the time. Literally, I’m writing all the time’” (Lawrence et al., 2025, 17:07). Engaging with the group helped us recognize ourselves as writers and resist valuing publishing in peer-reviewed journals to the exclusion of other forms of writing.

Reflection to action: Building writing support for educational developers

Reflecting on our experiences has led us to consider how educational developers, teaching centers, and universities can change how we think about and conduct academic writing. We offer the following recommendations to surface this aspect of the hidden curriculum and help institutions and educational developers adopt more equitable and supportive practices.

1. **Make the expectations for scholarly writing explicit.** When it comes to scholarly writing, expectations for hiring, promotion, and workload allocation and prioritization should be communicated transparently, along with any institutional guidelines on research or publishing for educational developers.
2. **Support educational developers’ scholarly writing.** Leaders can support educational developers by providing dedicated time to write and recruiting expert help to offer guidance and feedback, including brokering connections to editors and publishers. Educational developers can support one another by organizing writing groups and counterspaces to engage in collaborative writing and peer mentoring.
3. **Expand definitions of scholarly writing.** Educational developers produce valuable written academic work that supports teaching and learning, yet much of it remains unrecognized. Redefine academic writing to recognize different forms, styles, mediums, and voices that contribute meaningfully to the field and our universities’ missions.
4. **Recognize and attribute writing.** Educational developers’ writing is often attributed to the teaching center rather than the author. Despite the impact of educational developers’ writing, the invisibility of their work can further marginalize their scholarship. When educational developers are minoritized, this only exacerbates the erasure of essential labor these groups encounter in a variety of contexts (Babcock, et al., 2022; Murray & Kempenaar, 2018; O’Meara et al., 2017; Spencer et al., 2022; SSFNRI, 2017). Per the wishes of the author, teaching centers should document and attribute written work to its individual authors to inform internal performance reviews, recognition, and rewards.

Moving forward, the field of educational development must acknowledge, address, and further define components of the hidden curriculum of education development. New developers should understand that there are expectations around publishing unreflectively inherited from faculty publishing norms. Institutions should make expectations explicit and provide support. More ambitiously, institutions should work with educational developers to broaden definitions of scholarly writing, prioritizing visibility for the work of

minoritized educational developers. Perceptions of productivity and what counts should be more inclusive of whose work and which work is valued.

However, educational developers need not wait for their institutions to formally sanction or support their writing. Instead, we encourage developers to take initiative by forming academic writing groups that create a space for mutual support and collective growth. These groups can begin informally, starting with a few trusted colleagues committed to showing up for one another. Groups can experiment with collaborative practices that promote sustained momentum and achieving group members' goals. This can include establishing shared values, rotating facilitation, using co-writing or feedback circles, and conducting check-ins. As our experience illustrates, maintaining flexibility to adapt practices to the needs of the group is key for addressing challenges like limited time. We believe writing groups can serve as counterspaces that affirm the worth of our ideas and validate our identities as scholars and writers. As one member of our collaborative put it, "One of our values is that all writing-it counts" (Lawrence et al., 2025, 46:47). We hope that other educational developers will join us in reimagining what it means to be writers and finding a renewed sense of belonging.

References

- Babcock, L., Peyser, B., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2022). *The no club: Putting a stop to women's dead-end work*. Simon & Schuster.
- Caballero, M.S., & Knupsky, A. (2019). "We'll do whate'er we list": Growing, creating, and writing together as faculty of difference. In N. Simmons & A. Singh (Eds.), *Critical collaborative communities: Academic writing partnerships, groups, and retreats* (pp. 17–28). Brill Sense.
- Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for understanding the role of settings in marginalized individuals' adaptive responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1–2), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9497-7>
- Cropps, T.A. (2018, June 2). Writing groups as counterspaces for Black women graduate students at PWIs. *Diverse Education*. <https://www.diverseeducation.com/students/article/15102601/writing-groups-as-counterspaces-for-black-women-graduate-students-at-pwis>
- Jackson, P.W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Kiesow, C. W., Mount, G. R., Bunin, J., McMains, K. C., McFate, T., Hartzell, J., & Servey, J. (2023). A common trajectory toward a professional identity as a faculty developer. *Family Medicine*, 56(2), 108–114. <https://doi.org/10.22454/FamMed.2024.953164>
- Lawrence, S., Lockett, L., Onufer, L., & Yegnashankaran, K.K. (2025, Jan. 1). Academic writing collaborative. [Audio recording].
- Margolis, E. (2001). *The hidden curriculum in higher education*. Routledge.
- Murray, R., & Kempenaar, L. (2018). Why do women attend writing retreats? *Gender and Education*, 32(8), 1001–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1557321>
- O'Grady, K. (2024, October 22). Teaching centers aren't dumping grounds. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2024/10/15/teaching-learning-centers-arent-dumping-grounds-opinion>
- O'Meara, K., Kuvaeva, A., Nyunt, G., Waugaman, C., & Jackson, R. (2017). Asked more often: Gender differences in faculty workload in research universities and the work interactions that shape them. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1154–1186. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217716767>
- Rudenga, K.J., & Gravett, E.O. (2020). Imposter phenomenon in educational developers: Consequences and coping strategies. *To Improve the Academy*, 39(2). <https://doi.org/10.3998/tia.17063888.0039.201>

- Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (SSFNRIG). (2017). The burden of invisible work in academia: Social inequalities and time use in five university departments. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations.*, 39(39), 228–245.
- Sotto-Santiago, S. (2020). ‘Am I really good enough?’: Black and Latinx experiences with faculty development. *To Improve the Academy*, 39(2). <https://doi.org/10.3998/tia.17063888.0039.205>
- Spencer, E.C., Neikirk, K., Campbell, S.L., Powell-Roach, K.L., Morton, D., Shuler, H., Murray, S.A., & Hinton Jr., A. (2022). Intentional and unintentional benefits of minority writing accountability groups. *Trends Microbiol.*, 30(11), 1015–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tim.2022.08.005>
- Tate, L.B., & michaux, e. (2023). The call for counterspaces: Centering racialized support at a new institution of higher education. In S. Cupid & A.D. Tomlin (Eds.), *Black experiences in higher education: Faculty, staff, and students* (pp. 103–117). Information Age Publishing.
- Wentworth, R. A., Landmark, L. J., Blackwell, W., Vargo, K. K., & Lee, E. L. (2024). Virtual faculty writing groups in changing states of normal. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, 38(2), 17–27.
- Whitchurch, C. (2008). Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: The emergence of third space professionals in UK higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 62(4). <https://doi-org.pitt.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2008.00387.x>
- Wright, M. C. (2023). *Centers for teaching and learning: The new landscape in higher education* (1st ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Yim, I. S., Bandelj, N., Razorenova, O. V., & Wang, P. (2023). Writing communities to (re-) engage faculty: The U See I Write Initiative. *To Improve the Academy*, 42(2). <https://doi.org/10.3998/tia.3630>